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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



[*The Editor is not responsible for opinions expressed in this Department.*]

DEAR EDITOR: As there were several points in the proceedings of our last State Society meeting over which there was some variance of opinion, with, as a result, some confusion of ideas, it seemed to us that it would be well to consult some perfectly unimpeachable authority for the help of any members who might feel uncertain as to correct parliamentary procedure.

We consulted three authorities,—a teacher of parliamentary law who is widely known, a prominent physician who holds official positions in medical organizations, and a legal firm representing the highest authority in the State.

Each one gave us exactly the same information upon our points. We may therefore feel confident of its correctness. Their statements may be summed up as follows:

1. *As to our form of organization:* There is nothing objectionable or contrary to law and order in our double form of organization—viz., individuals and delegates. The medical societies adopted this plan and found it fair to give associations one vote to every ten members.

2. *As to membership:* No new members should be admitted until the by-laws are entirely completed and the exact ratio decided for delegate membership. The present members of the society must therefore complete the by-laws, decide on the ratio, and incorporate it by amendment in the clause dealing with members. The secretary should then inform all associations and invite them to send their full number of delegates to subsequent meetings.

3. *As to the quorum:* In voluntary associations, if no quorum has been fixed by the regulations, the members present at a meeting are competent to transact business.

Very truly yours,

ANNA C. MAXWELL,
MARY E. THORNTON,
L. L. DOCK.

DEAR EDITOR: I should like to answer Miss Brennan's letter on the "Non-Payment System" which appeared in your issue of January. I asked through Miss Barnard at a meeting of the Congress for a discussion on this subject to bring forth the opinions of superintendents and nurses. Judging from what Miss Brennan writes, it does not seem to be a popular idea at present. Is it that we are not prepared for it yet, and fear by adopting it we may exclude women who will make good nurses and be an honor to the profession? With women's usual perseverance in all matters, one thoroughly earnest and untiring in her new work from the highest motives would not surely allow herself to be daunted for such a reason. What profession other than nursing pays a man or woman while he or she is beginning it? Why should a nurse be paid during her training any more than a woman qualifying herself to become a teacher or a doctor studying

for her profession? That it requires a large or even a moderate sum of money to carry a pupil through the three years of training has not been shown. I have been told of a nurse who required but twenty-five dollars a year, and another but fifty dollars during her entire course, and I dare say there are some who have even had less.

Why should not the woman who is ambitious to enter the profession borrow this small sum and pay interest on it as a business transaction? It could be quickly paid back when she has finished her training. With the hospital supplying uniforms and text-books a nurse's requirements are not many, and the habit of economy formed during training will be most valuable later. I think it is most reasonable to look forward to the time, and that very soon, when the non-payment of pupils will be established in all our schools. And we need not fear that it will keep out future good nurses, but rather bring in better ones.

Yours sincerely,

ANNA C. JAMME,

Superintendent of Nurses, New England Hospital for Women and
Children, Boston.

DEAR EDITOR: After reading the letter on hospital discipline which appeared in the January number of your journal, I feel tempted to say a few words from my own experience and from my point of view.

I am fortunate in being able to say that I hold three diplomas, one from one of the best schools in the country, and the other two were granted me in post-graduate courses.

Although many years have gone by, I like to think of my first entrance into hospital life. I was greeted kindly by the superintendent of nurses, and then was put in charge of a head nurse, who took me in to supper. I only hope as time went on and it was my duty to take probationers under my wing, that I gave the comfort to them that this head nurse gave to me. Another nurse who showed me to my room said, "I will call for you in the morning and take you in to breakfast." I felt at once that I had come among friends.

The experience at table which your subscriber relates was unfortunate. I am glad to say that I know nothing about such table etiquette. I remember feeling hurt when I saw a head nurse and a senior nurse laughing over a blunder that I had made, and of course I had other experiences that made me unhappy for a time, yet when I look back upon my head nurses I feel that my debt to them is very large. I did not chafe under the discipline, and with few exceptions found it easy to comply with the rules. I can understand how it must seem to some young women who have had things pretty much their own way all their lives, but if they are made of the right material they will see the wisdom of the discipline.

I take it for granted that your subscriber is a graduate of a large school, and perhaps she is speaking from an experience in which she has been able to train large classes of nurses without what she terms "military discipline." If such is the case, I think that it is only fair that she should give us the advantages of her new methods.

My superintendent had spent many years in the work, and as for being "bitter" or "cynical," such terms could never be applied to her, and I am sure that she is trustful even after many disappointments where trust has been abused. I feel sorry for any nurse who goes out from her school without the

influence of such a woman, one in whose footsteps she is proud to follow, and whom she may hope to work up to as years go on.

In closing, let me add that my feeling towards my hospital is that which one feels towards a very pleasant home.

ANOTHER SUBSCRIBER.

DEAR EDITOR: I wish to correct a statement made in the December JOURNAL in reference to the number of nurses in California. My impression is that there are as many nurses in California, in proportion, as there are in any of the Eastern States, and more are coming every year. The delightful climate and the fact that thousands of tourists make California their home for a number of months of the year are great inducements.

In every community there are those who do not appreciate the graduate nurse, but I feel safe in saying that the number of those who do not appreciate her is no greater in California than in any other State.

A CALIFORNIA NURSE.

DEAR EDITOR: Mention was made in a recent issue of the JOURNAL (which I read with great pleasure and interest) in regard to so many of our hospital and training-school workers retiring from active work on account of ill-health. I believe the only way to prevent this is to use some of our misdirected energy to solve the problem of economic work. Many nurses, especially institutional workers, allow themselves to be constantly under a severe nervous strain, and are repeatedly approaching the fatigue limit without making the final step over the line into a complete physical collapse. And how unnecessary and easily avoided this final step would be if only we would investigate our own work and methods more carefully, for to rule means to understand, and to understand we must investigate and study our own particular occupation, at the same time cultivating an energetic, *calm*, optimistic mind and equanimity. When we become well poised it does not mean contentment with self, but constant readjustment, until we possess an understanding of the economy of force, which is the secret of working easily and well, and of spending our power to the best advantage. It seems to me that a nurse who has so much individual contact with life's great realities should realize that poise, the point between passiveness and activity, will restore to the body many wasted forces and act as a preventive to that burdensome friction which dims our sense of sympathy towards others and prevents us from seeing clearly how to act and overcome obstacles which our inner calmness and self-control must conquer. Therefore, with the coöperation of poise, we can cultivate those states of mind conducive to health—peace and happiness.

Very sincerely,

EMMA L. POND,
Cromwell, Conn.

DEAR EDITOR: The necessity of keeping a patient's body warmly covered during operation, the dangers which arise from being chilled while under the depressing effect of an anæsthetic, cannot be repeated too often to nurses.

There are, however, dangers to nurses and doctors, of which I wish to write, brought about by carelessness in unnecessary exposure of a patient's body.

There is much in the work of a nurse which familiarizes her with those things

which become vulgar if made common, and for the protection of her own sense of delicacy and propriety a nurse must be on her guard. She must show by her professional demeanor that she will countenance no conduct that would not be proper if the patient were rational, and she must feel it her duty to guard the patient's rights in the matter of exposure of the body while the patient is in this unconscious condition.

To their honor be it said that the great majority of medical men and nurses are true to the highest ideals of their professions, and feel it a sacred obligation to respect the moral feelings and privacies of their patients. However, occasionally one meets with those whose standards are such that they neither possess the finer moral sense themselves nor respect it in others. Such do not hesitate to make suggestive remarks or relate improper stories, which are often provoked and intensified by the unnecessary exposure of the patient. This reacts upon the character of all who participate therein, and here the dignity of the nurse may often control the situation and act as a damper upon all looseness of conversation. The nurse who dares, even though she stands alone, to show her disgust at such times and her disapproval of these things will gain the respect of even those who participate in such vulgarity, and the good she does to herself and her profession cannot be estimated.

C. S. L.

DEAR EDITOR: I have felt much interest in your editorial on the use of the male catheter by pupils in training. It is a question which periodically arises, and I well remember my own feelings of consternation, akin to having the floor fall away from one's feet, when I once met in a board of women managers an utter lack of consideration for the sensitiveness of nurses in training on this point, with inability to comprehend the reason for refusal. With *one* exception, the medical men I have known have never held such work to be the duty of the nurse in hospitals, and at a recent conference of hospital directors in Germany (where feeling on such points is supposed to be coarse) it was unanimously decided (and these directors were all men) that pupils should not be required to perform duties repugnant to their feelings.

Many women managers hold an exaggerated view of the difficulty of catheterizing. Any intelligent graduate who knows enough anatomy to realize that two curves instead of one are to be followed can use the male catheter without the slightest difficulty, and we all know that when urgency demands there is no office which a nurse will refuse for any patient. But in a hospital no such urgency exists. If there are no orderlies, there are doctors, and nurses in training should not be required to attend orderly cases.

EX-SUPERINTENDENT.

DEAR EDITOR: Will you kindly publish in your JOURNAL a list of the various hospitals in New York where nurses may take a post-graduate course in general or special work, and oblige

Yours very sincerely,

MELROSE, MASS.

MARY G. JOY.

[Woman's Memorial, West One-hundred-and-Fourth Street; Woman's Hospital, Lexington Avenue.—ED.]

DEAR EDITOR: I thought M. L. K.'s diet-lists for a confinement case very good indeed, and would only demur to one of her vegetables,—viz., potatoes.

She mentions potato in each of her four dinners, sweet potatoes once and white potatoes three times. I would suggest, rather, rice, or well-cooked breakfast hominy, or stewed celery, as a vegetable in place of the potato, which my experience has taught me induces constipation and flatus, with the exception of the extremely well-cooked baked potato.

If mashed potato is served to a patient it should be most thoroughly cooked and pressed through a fine colander. I have known people with a tendency to constipation who are quite undone by eating potatoes, while by avoiding them entirely they keep in perfectly good condition.

PRIVATE NURSE.

To the Editor of THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING.

Your correspondent of February 7 seems to have received and has certainly conveyed an entirely wrong impression as to matters connected with the Connecticut Training-School. I may say that the New Haven Hospital was founded seventy-six years ago, and the Training-School was chartered by the Legislature in 1873 and has enjoyed an honorable and peaceful career for twenty-nine years. It has graduated four hundred and seventy-four nurses, many of whom have filled responsible positions in other schools and have turned their training to account on both sides of the Pacific and in the islands east and west. Its Executive Committee includes members of the medical board and hospital directors of long standing. It is therefore with some surprise that this responsible company of men and women find themselves held up to public contumely by your correspondent in your responsible magazine. The impression she seeks to convey and the statements directly made by her close associate and assistant in other nursing journals are equally far from the real state of the case. She knows that the committee of the school wish the pupils to know something of this branch of nursing, and have suitably arranged for it; but she cannot show, for she has never received, any order from anyone requiring that they should "be taught practically" in the wards for men.

The only foundation for her statement was something *entirely apart* from any action of the Executive Committee, was a personal matter between a ward head nurse and a *single member* of the committee, who assumes the whole responsibility of a misunderstanding all round. These are the facts:

That in consequence of the bungling ignorance of "trained nurses" in this matter, a patient known to this committee in a private family has been put to great suffering, and another, with also his physician, to serious inconvenience. It is childish to say that a nurse entirely unaccustomed to certain sudden emergencies in the case of men, especially after surgical operations, can be inspired on the moment to do what is needed, or that she can recall the physician five miles away on his country rounds. If she is worthy her name, or the large sums paid for her services, she will be carefully prepared before leaving the school for the work before her.

This has been impressed upon the Executive Committee of the school, and they have taken the matter into serious consideration. Acting upon their misunderstood wish, a member of the committee, finding a patient apparently dying, *entirely delirious*, isolated in a small room with his attendant alone (an elderly and sedate person), who was giving this treatment, this member of the committee, I say, gave directions to the head nurse of the adjoining ward to secure as much of the needed instruction for herself and assistant as she could by

observation. This, I grant you, was a mistake, but made on a misunderstanding all round. It was, however, a private communication to the ward head nurse alone, for *this case only*, and for *this ward only*. It concerned *nobody else* in the whole hospital. It was respectfully received, demurred to, *never acted upon*, and promptly withdrawn. No candid person will see a resemblance between this isolated act, this *private* personal direction to a single nurse, "never acted upon, and promptly withdrawn," and the assertion made by your correspondent that the committee "require that the pupils of the school be taught practically" this special service. Neither she nor her assistant have received any order whatever justifying such an assertion. The performance of such a service by the pupils in the general wards would be an outrage, and to intimate that it is required is a serious offence.

The committee have met the just complaints of private families by arranging that before terminating their connection (of two years and eight months) with the school, the pupils shall receive instruction in the use of the soft catheter, given only by an attending physician, for little boys in the children's ward. A modesty which sees evil in any service for a sick child is a false modesty and out of place among self-respecting young women in a nursing school. The pupils of the Connecticut School are incapable of it.

I should add that the further assertion of your correspondent, that "The authorities of the hospital will not allow the instruction to be given," is another imaginary thing. Four of these "authorities" are members of the Training-School Board, and no sort of action has been taken by any "authorities" in this matter.

The superintendency of the school has been committed to a lady of maturity and long experience in hospitals.

MRS. FRANCIS BACON.

NEW HAVEN.

DEAR EDITOR: When fumigating with sulphur at the close of a scarlet-fever case I had a newly equipped bath-room, aside from the room and halls, to attend to. While I know that sulphur injures nickel, I did not know of any way by which to prevent it.

Soon after leaving this case a member of the family said that the plumber told her that the nickel would not have been blackened had I rubbed it with vaseline before fumigating. Would you advise trying this when I have another contagious case? This may be of help to another beginner in private nursing.

I enjoy your magazine very much, and trust that the "Practical Hints" will continue throughout the year.

I suppose that I may speak of the magazine as *our* magazine, now that I am

A NEW SUBSCRIBER.

February 6, 1902.

[The plumber was right, and you should have been taught this in your training-school.—ED.]

[LETTERS to the Editor must be accompanied by the name in full and address of the writer, otherwise such communications cannot be recognized. The name need not appear in the JOURNAL unless so desired.—ED.]